

Country reels under frequent outages

STAR REPORT

Frequent power snaps and low-voltage supply have put a tremendous burden on the people, disrupting their normal life and hampering agricultural, industrial, and commercial activities across the country.

The crisis both in urban and rural areas seriously disturbed the SSC examinees in the last couple of months and is likely to do the same to the students going to sit the HSC examinations beginning from tomorrow.

As yet, there is no sign of let-up in the acute power shortage, which appeared right at the beginning of summer, while agitation continues at different parts of the country in demand of uninterrupted and adequate electricity supply.

Business leaders and industrialists have been crying out for elec-

tricity time and again, but the government just kept on blaming system loss, problems in distribution system, and lack of large investments in the power sector for the scarcity.

People in almost all the districts said they are disappointed with the government's handling of the power situation and may take the path of agitation if it does not improve.

POWER PICTURE IN A FEW DISTRICTS

Khulna has a daily demand of at least 500 megawatts (MW) but the district is receiving around 200MW as several power plants in the region are out of order, our Khulna correspondent reports.

Khulna plunges into darkness several times during the night as three out of four power generating units of Goalpara Power Plant went out of order with major mechanical

problems. Two 28MW and one 110MW power units are unable to generate power due to either shortage of fuel, defects in the machines or underground cables. The other unit of the plant is producing only 35MW instead of 60MW which is its maximum capability.

"Power cuts in the south-western region will take an alarming turn in the near future if new plants are not set up and steady supply of fuel is not ensured," said an engineer of Western Zone Power Distribution Company Limited.

Power crisis in Satkhira is adversely affecting the fish processing plants and cold storages as the Power Development Board (PDB) supplies only two to three megawatts against the daily demand of 8MW, our correspondent in Satkhira reports.

The Rural Electrification Board (REB) supplies 8MW against the

daily demand of 31MW in the district town.

Power cuts for 16 to 18 hours a day have become a regular feature since the beginning of the summer disrupting production even in the state-run Sundarban Textile Mills and other small industries and business establishments.

Satkhira Chamber of Commerce and Industries President Sheikh Azhar Hossain said frequent power cuts and voltage fluctuations are damaging machinery in at least 39 fish processing plants, three cold storages and over 49 ice making factories.

"Shrimp export will be hampered this year as the processing plants do not get adequate power supply," he added.

Bangladesh Shrimp Cultivators Association President Aftab-uz-Zaman said huge quantities of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Pakistanis in Khulna protest their listing as voters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-two thousand out of 36,000 stranded Pakistanis living in Khulna Metropolitan city are on the draft voter lists published last week.

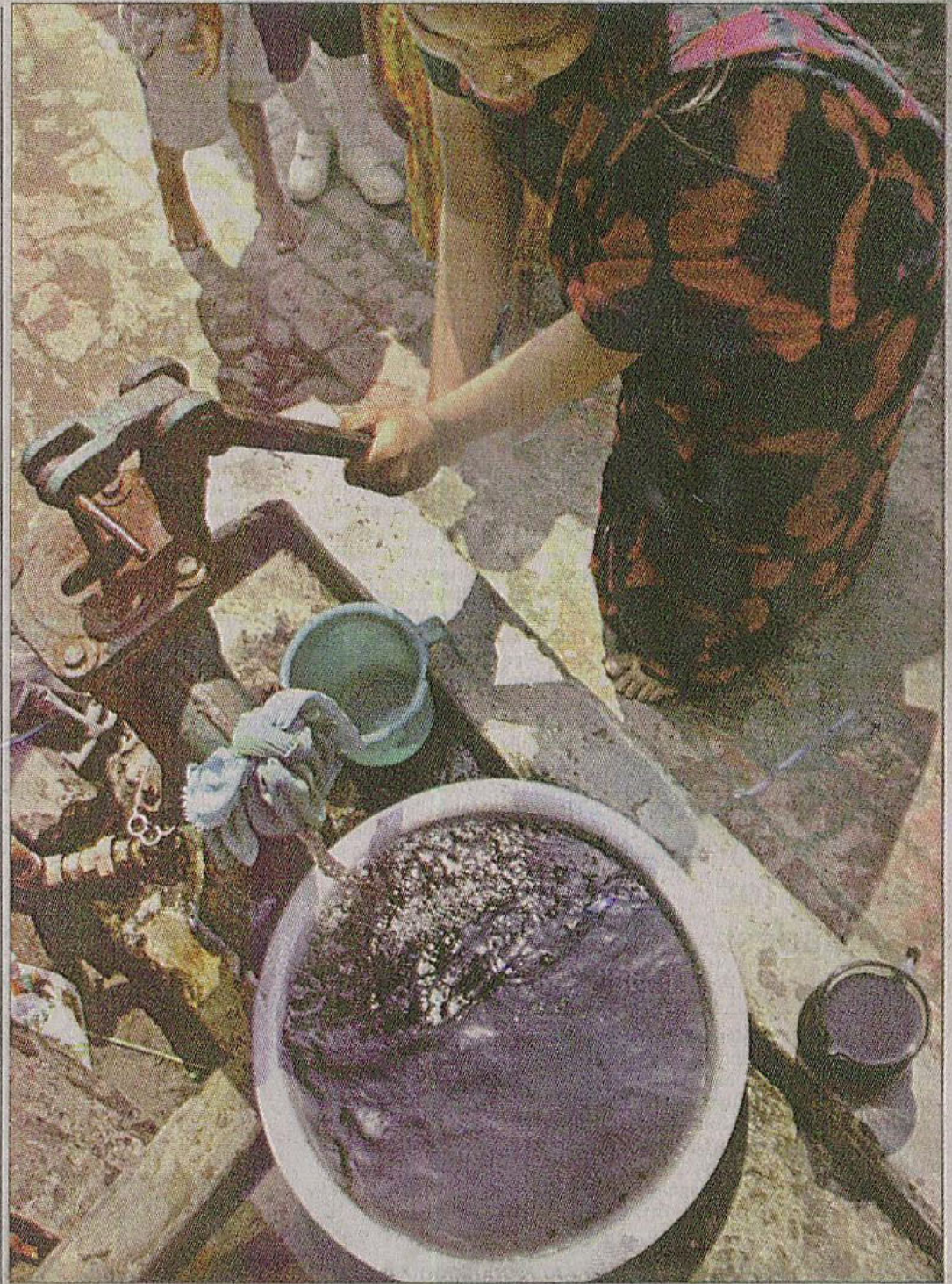
President of Bangladesh Muhajir Welfare and Development committee Qari Mohammad Yunus expressed his sharp reaction against listing of 22,000 stranded Pakistanis who do not want to live in this country.

Qari Mohammad Yunus, who is also head of Khalishpur Al Falah Academy, said sixty per cent of the stranded Pakistanis included in the draft voter list were neither in the previous lists nor could they produce their nationality certificates before the Election Commission.

He said a large number of non-Bangladeshi Muhajirs who were born and brought up in this country have been left out of the draft voter lists.

The district election officer refuted the allegation of enrolling any stranded Pakistanis who could not show nationality certificates.

He, however, said the allegation will be properly probed.



Tubewells connected to Wasa supply lines at Pater Bagh in Demra in the city produce filthy water adding to the woe of the water crisis.

PHOTO: STAR

4 electrocuted in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four people, including a father and son, were electrocuted at Shyampur and Sutrapur in the capital within a span of 13 hours, ending at 8:30am yesterday.

Police said all the victims were killed as they came in contact with live electric wires snapped by storm on Thursday night.

Mohammad Russell, 26, was electrocuted as he hand touched a fallen electric wire at their house at Boubazar in Shyampur area at around 9:30pm on Thursday.

Russell's father Abdul Majid, 55, was also electrocuted when he came to rescue Russell.

Russell and his father were rushed to a local clinic where doctors declared them dead.

Yesmin Akhter, 20, was electrocuted as she came in contact with a live electric wire at her house at East Jurain in Shyampur at 7:15pm on Thursday.

In Sutrapur, Mohammad Ishaq, 28, an employee of a vegetable

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

40kg bomb found in water body

UNB, Kishoreganj

Police recovered a 40-kg bomb from Khama beel (a large water body) in Pakundia upazila under the district on Thursday afternoon.

A fisherman netted the bomb when he was fishing in the beel, police said, adding that they seized the bomb and put it under the ground at Pakundia Police Station.

The bomb experts of Dhaka Cantonment have been informed of the matter. Additional Police Superintendent Shariful Alam said.

Locals said a warplane crashed there during the Second World War.

OIL PRICE ADJUSTMENT

Future on a slippery path

INAM AHMED

As oil prices remain volatile, different scenarios are emerging about its impact on Bangladesh economy -- whether the foreign exchange reserves can withstand the price surge, whether inflation will hit the ceiling, and whether interest rates will be so high as to stymie production.

Estimates show, if fuel price reaches \$75 a barrel, not much higher than the current \$73, the government will need an additional \$409 million in fuel bills. But if it hits \$85 a barrel, as many analysts predict, the bill will increase by \$677 million. The question remains whether the economy can

absorb such a shock.

A preliminary analysis of a foreign financial institution says if the growth in exports, workers' remittance and FDI inflow continues to the extent of \$2.3 billion more in FY06 over FY05, the economy can soak up the impact without much difficulty, and inflation and exchange rate would not be affected. This idea stems from the fact that in the last 24 months, Bangladesh has withstood a significant jump in oil price from \$30 a barrel to \$68.

But in an unlikely situation of foreign exchange inflow stagnation and a rise in import of non-food items -- say in the range of 20 per cent -- exchange rate could hit as

high as Tk 84 to a dollar. In such a case, inflation may increase by 1 to 3 per cent, if the government finances the additional imports of oil from domestic banks, leading to liquidity pressure.

In the event of oil price hitting \$85 a barrel, a wide spectrum of sectors including petrochemicals, chemicals, cement, essential commodities, and marketing will be directly hit. If the high price level persists for more than six months, most consumer industries will suffer an interest rate hike.

And if the government continues subsidising internal fuel prices, this will increase the fiscal deficit by 0.8 per cent of the GDP when

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

2 killed while making bombs in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Two people were killed and at least four others injured in a blast while making bombs at a house in Kaliganj upazila yesterday.

Of the dead, Amirul Islam, 35, hailed from Bahera village of Debhata upazila while identity of the other one could not be known. The injured are Hasan, Zia and two

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Rains swamp city areas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The capital and different parts of the country yesterday experienced downpour that disrupted normal life, economic activities and road communications in many areas.

A number of areas in the capital went under ankle-to-knee deep water resulting in sufferings to people. Traffic movement was greatly affected due to submersion of many roads.

Rainwater inundated Bangladesh Secretariat compound, the VIP Road in front of the Prime Minister's Office and many other major roads including Manik Mia Avenue, Bijoy Sarani, Dar-us-Salam Road, Airport Road, Mirpur Road, Outer Circular Road and Bijoynagar road.

Due to heavy rain, a Dhaka-Kolkata flight was delayed for

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

City swells in anger at water, power crises

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People across the city are seething at the persistent water and power crises, and locals of different areas have started taking to the streets and demonstrating against the misery, following the lead of Shanir Akhra.

The residents of Maghbazar yesterday demonstrated for uninterrupted supply of water and power while those of Mirpur and Labagh are learnt to be preparing for demonstrations in their areas today and tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the Demra-

Shyampur Sangram Parishad yesterday held meetings in different areas to mobilise people in its campaign for water and power.

It also formed three volunteer committees at Shyampur, Jurain and Palashpur.

Some three hundred locals in Maghbazar yesterday brought out a procession, demanding adequate water and power supplies. The processionists carrying lanterns marched through different lanes in the neighbourhood and held a rally on Chairmanbari playground at 5:00pm.

At the rally, the residents spoke

of immense sufferings stemming from acute crises of water and power since last month.

"We experience load-shedding a couple of times during daytime and at least three times at night," said a local.

The HSC examinees are the worst affected as their preparations for the exam are being severely hampered due to power shortages, said a father of a candidate.

The people of Mirpur expressed the same sentiment. They alleged that the water shortage has been plaguing different areas including

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



A rickshaw with passengers wades through knee-deep water on a Nayatola road in the city's Maghbazar area after yesterday's heavy shower.

PHOTO: STAR

Internal management key to economic health

Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad tells The Daily Star

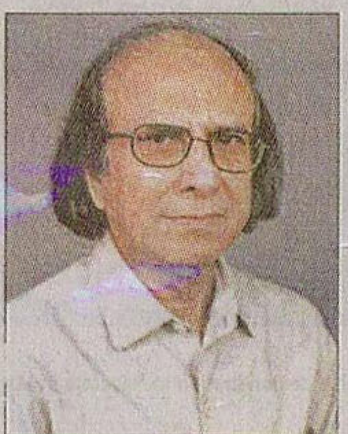
REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Internal management, not external factors, plays the pre-eminent role in keeping the economy stable and growing, said Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Economic Association.

"A country always faces external opportunities and challenges. The need is to understand the external processes and developments and make responses to minimise the challenges and maximise the opportunities," Ahmad, who also chairs Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, told The Daily Star in an interview last week.

So, he argued, if there is internal mismanagement, the internal and external problems will not be addressed properly and their adverse implications may combine

to play havoc with the economy. "While external situations often create trouble for a country, it is internal management that in the end plays the decisive role in deter-



mining the country's economic situation."

In his opinion, Bangladesh lacks efficiency in economic management to a large extent, and therefore a huge need is there for developing "human capabilities for effective management of the national affairs."

The Daily Star (DS): What are the economic challenges Bangladesh faces at this moment?

Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad (QKA): The challenges are many. The key ones include ever-increasing petroleum prices in the international market, price hike of essential commodities like rice, oil, pulses, sugar, poultry items, fish, meat, onion, vegetables, etc, severe power shortage, persisting foreign currency crisis, low disbursement

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

200 killed in Lagos oil pipeline blast

AFP, Lagos

Up to 200 people burned to death in a fireball Friday when a vandalised fuel pipeline blew up at a beach village near Nigeria's economic capital Lagos, police said.

Scorched beyond recognition corpses floated on the water or lay exposed on the sand as rescue workers and police picked through the debris.

"The estimated number of

people who died is between 150 and 200. The people who died in the inferno are suspected to be pipeline vandals," Lagos Police Chief Emmanuel Adebayo told reporters, although another official put the toll at more than 200.

Adebayo said the area has been protected. "There is no further fire and no more leakage on the pipeline," he adding, "It is suspected that a pipeline burst led to the fire."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

TERRIBLE TRAVEL

Another round of launch disasters looms large

PINAKI ROY

Despite a number of catastrophic river mishaps in the recent years, faulty vessels continue plying the river routes, threatening the country with yet another round of disasters in the coming monsoon.

The owners of some vessels,

which were declared unfit, are plying them after changing their colours and names.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

OBITUARY

THE NAMAZ-E-JANAZA OF LATE HUMAYUN KHAN PANNI, FORMER DEPUTY SPEAKER OF BANGLADESH, WILL BE HELD ON SATURDAY MAY 13, 2006 AT THE GULSHAN AZAD MASJID AFTER ZOHR PRAYERS. MR. H. K. PANNI PASSED AWAY ON THURSDAY MAY 11, 2006. HE WILL BE LAID TO REST IN THE FAMILY GRAVEYARD IN KAROTIA.

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STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The second regional dialogue on "National Election 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development" will be held in Jessore today.

It is being held as part of a series of programmes organised jointly by policy think-tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Channel 1.

Eminent academics and professionals, development and cultural activists, public representatives, political leaders and civil society representatives of the district are expected to speak at the dialogue beginning at 9:30am.

Members of the Nagorik Committee 2006 who are preparing a "Vision Paper" for the country will also be present to receive public feedback.

The first one was held in Mymensingh on April 29.